

23. MELANISTIC FORM OF THE ROYAL SNAKE
(*SPALEROSPHIS DIADEMA* SCHLEGEL)
(With a photograph)



Photo . Whiskered Black Royal Snake.

During the month of April 1988. I had seen a black coloured snake with artificial whiskers in a snake-charmer show at the Vadodara City. It was a melanistic form of the Royal Snake *Spalerosphis diadema* (Schlegel). After the show I inquired of the snake-charmer Mr. Gabbarnath Lalvadi about the snake. Apparently he had got the black snake from a snake-charmer of Maharashtra State. (Most of the snake-charmers do not have the skill to catch snakes and are supplied the snakes by the few who do have the skill). The long horsehair is implanted in the head region of the snake.

The display of a live whiskered snake earns more money for the Snake charmer.

Measurements: Total body length 168 cm; Tail 37 cm; Supralabials 10, a preocular and a series of subocular separating the labialas from the eye, Postocular 2; Temporals 3 + 2; Lower labials 12, 6th is smaller than others; Pair of internasal present; Loreal 2; Body scale 29 rows (29:29:24), scale keeled, outermost five rows both side are smooth; Ventrals 274; Caudals 120; Anal plate 2; Sex male.

I had also seen a black Royal Snake five years ago with one of my friends, Dr. Hasit Vaidya, who purchased the snake from a snake-charmer at Ahmedabad, which was received from North Gujarat.

The species of *S. diadema* has two subspecies or colour forms (1) *S. d. diadema* and (2) *S. d. atriceps*. Also a melanistic form has been reported (Daniel 1983). Could the melanistic form of *S. diadema* be a rare third subspecies?

July 14, 1988.

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REFERENCES

- DANIEL, J.C. (1983): The Book of Indian Reptiles. Bombay Natural History Society, p. i-x + 1-141.

24. RECORD OF *SYNEGIA* SP. (LEPIDOPTERA : GEOMETRIDAE) INFESTING BLACK PEPPER (*PIPER NIGRUM* L.)¹

Over twenty species of insect pests have been recorded on black pepper (*Piper nigrum* L.) in India (Pillai 1978). During 1984-'86 caterpillars of *Synegia* sp. (Lepidoptera : Geometridae) were observed to damage spikes and foliage of black pepper vines at

Peruvannamuzhi (Calicut district, Kerala). Preliminary observations on its biology and nature and extent of damage are reported here. The present report is the first record of the pest on black pepper.

Biology: Newly hatched caterpillars measured 2.5 x 0.5 mm and were pale green with a light brown band running longitudinally on the lateral and dorsal aspects. Fully grown caterpillars measured 35.9 x

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